DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE

SUBJECT:
 DIRECTIVE LIMITING USE OF DOD COMPUTERS AND NETWORKS TO ACCESS
SPECIFIC RECREATIONAL WEBSITES

BRIEFERS:
 REAR ADMIRAL ELIZABETH HIGHT, VICE DIRECTOR OF DEFENSE INFORMATION
   SYSTEMS AGENCY, AND DEPUTY COMMANDER, JOINT TASK FORCE GLOBAL
NETWORK OPERATIONS; AND VERNON BETTENCOURT, DEPUTY CHIEF INFORMATION
OFFICER AND G6, U.S. ARMY

MODERATOR:
 TIMOTHY BERGLING, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

LOCATION: VIA CONFERENCE CALL FROM THE PENTAGON

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MR. BERGLING: I would like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense Roundtable for Thursday, May 17, 2007. My name is Tim Bergling. I'm a new media producer with the Office of the Secretary of Defense of Public Affairs, moderating our call today.

Today we're honored to have as our guest Rear Admiral Elizabeth Hight, principal director of operations for Defense Information Systems Agency; deputy commander, Joint Task Force Global Network Operations.

And, sir -- and your name again, sir, standing by.

MR. BETTENCOURT: Vernon Bettencourt. And I'm the deputy chief information officer and G6 of the Army.

A note to all the bloggers on the line today -- please remember to clearly state your name, your blog, organization, and please respect our guests' time, keep your questions succinct and to the point.

And at that point, Admiral Hight, ma'am, if you'd like to make a statement, go right ahead.

MR. BETTENCOURT: Tim, if I could just clarify really quickly, the admiral is the vice director of the Defense Information Systems Agency.

MR. BERGLING: Okay, sorry about that.

ADM. HIGHT: Okay, well good afternoon. And thank you for participating in today's discussion on this important issue that will allow us to clarify the facts regarding a recent decision by the Department of Defense to limit Department of Defense computers and networks from accessing certain recreational websites.

To ensure DOD networks are available for combat operations and critical support activities, the department issued a directive on May 14th that prohibits DOD computers from accessing certain specific recreational websites. The measure is intended to

preserve military bandwidth for operational missions and enhance DOD computer network security.

The selection of these particular sites was based on the volume of traffic moving from official DOD networks to the Internet. This is in no way a comment on the content, purpose or uses of the websites themselves. As necessary, additional sites may be added in the future as part of ongoing efforts to ensure DOD networks have sufficient throughput available to conduct operational and supporting missions, as well as enhanced DOD network security.

It is important to point out that this directive does not prohibit any individual, including DOD personnel or their families, from posting to or accessing these websites from personal or commercial network providers. It only restricts the use of DOD computer network resources to access these sites.

It is also important to point out that in Iraq and Afghanistan, many of these sites, as well as others, have already been blocked by DOD for more than two years, some for as long as four years. Consequently, this directive has no impact on our deployed forces in Southwest Asia and does not prevent deployed DOD personnel from communicating with family members or loved ones. There are a wide variety of communication services, such as e-mail, telephones, and video teleconferencing in many locations in Southwest Asia, in addition to commercial Internet cafes.

In addition, the Army Knowledge Online, Defense Knowledge Online Network is available to military members and their families, providing a rich information-sharing environment including e-mail, file-sharing of pictures, videos and documents, discussion forums or blogging, instant messaging chat rooms and video messaging.

Mr. Bettencourt, the Army deputy chief information officer and deputy G6, is here with us today and can discuss and answer any questions you have regarding Army knowledge online and these services available to deployed personnel in more detail.

DOD Morale, Welfare and Recreation facilities in Iraq and Afghanistan offer commercial internet services, which are widely available. These services are not affected by this directive. Deployed personnel can still access recreational internet websites from the MWR internet cafes and other facilities in many locations around the world, because these alternative sites do not rely on military bandwidth.

I must point out, there will always be a small number of troops in combat conditions and at remote bases who may not have immediate access to these commercial internet services or non-DOD computer networks. Their missions and the often austere conditions they work within preclude this. But again they have various means available to them to communicate with friends and family, and can always use the services I've mentioned when they return to garrison.

Again, thank you for attending today, and Mr. Bettencourt and I are happy to take your questions now.

MR. BERGLING: Okay, thank you very much, ma'am.

Mark Finkelstein of News Busters, you're up first.

Q   Okay, thank you very much. Admiral Hight and Mr. Bettencourt, we appreciate very much your being with us. The admiral really to a certain extent anticipated my question. I was specifically going to ask about MWR sites, and that has been asked and answered then. But let me move on.

When I was in Baghdad in November, in addition to spending some time in those internet cafes in the MWR sites, when we had to send our stories back, the PAOs that we worked with were very, very kind and cooperative in making their computers available. And what mainly we're -- I'm talking about being out in Anbar province on Marine bases there. (Inaudible.) We found that connections were fairly slow, sort of surprisingly slow on DOD computers.

I'm just wondering, can you talk a little bit about the challenges that are faced in providing high-speed internet service, and what if anything we're working on to improve some of those speeds?

ADM. HIGHT: Well, anytime you have a resource in a resource- constrained environment, in this case high-speed connectivity in an area like the Anbar province that does not have infrastructure to support that, you're relying primarily on commercial satellite services. And those transmission pipes, so to speak, are in fact limited. So one of the reasons that we are trying to preserve the DOD network bandwidth for official communication is to ensure that we do not have a network that is slow when we absolutely need it to be there.

Q   Mm-hm. Understood. Okay. Thank you.

MR. BERGLING: Okay, thank you very much, ma'am. Dave Axe, you're next.

Q   Admiral and Mr. Bettencourt, thanks for taking time. My name is David Axe. I blog for a number of sites, including Danger Room. And I have a couple questions. First, can you give us a sense of -- can you give us some numbers to hang this on to give us a sense of how bad the problem was with traffic at these sites eating up bandwidth? Just some figures, some percentages, some numbers to make this more tangible?

ADM. HIGHT: Well, recall that one of the things that I mentioned was that the blocking of many (of them ?) in Southwest Asia has been going on for some time. And so what we see from a global perspective, which is the perspective from which this directive was written, was that as technology increases and more and more high-

bandwidth capabilities are made available on commercial websites, the more we see an impact to DOD networks.

And so rather than saying to you that we had such a terrible problem that we had to do something, what we have done over the last six to nine months is study the trends that we see and try to get ahead of a problem before it becomes a problem. So we have been proactive in our approach to ensuring that we do not get into a situation where bandwidth becomes a huge problem across the global network.

Q   Now, the DOD, of course, is making -- is constantly trying to increase its available bandwidth. What you're saying, then, is that the trend appeared that bandwidth devoted to these commercial sites was going to overtake the expansion of DOD bandwidth?

ADM. HIGHT: We just simply never wanted to get to that problem.

Q   But it appeared to be happening, though, which is why --

ADM. HIGHT: Well, I would just say that technology is using more and more bandwidth all the time, right. So video -- streaming video and technologies like that that are becoming more widely available could present a potential problem for us, and we are trying to be proactive before it becomes a problem. That's not to say that we don't need more bandwidth to support ongoing operations and support functions, but we are simply -- simply trend that information and try to get ahead of the problem.

Q   When I see a problem like this, I guess there are two ways -- generally speaking, there are two ways you can address it. You can increase the supply of bandwidth or you can try to decrease the demand. And what you're trying to do is decrease the demand. But I want to understand how much increasing the supply is a factor in a solution to the overall bandwidth problem.

ADM. HIGHT: We actually are trying to approach this two-pronged problem in a balanced way. So we certainly have a bandwidth problem, and we also are -- just as you are and any commercial firm is, we are becoming more and more concerned about the potential for network security incidents.

Q   Oh.

ADM. HIGHT: And so if we can find the right balance between bandwidth and security in order to support our ongoing operations while providing alternative sites for recreational use by our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines, that's precisely what we are trying to do.

MR. BERGLING: Okay. Thank you very much, ma'am.

David, we'll come back to you if we have time. Steve Field, go ahead.

Q   Hi. This is Steve Field from the D-Ring, and I want to thank both you, ma'am, and Mr. Bettencourt for taking time to speak with us today. My question deals more with the public affairs implications of this decision, namely in that DOD public affairs, Army public affairs, MNF-I public affairs seem to be turning toward some of these sites, namely MySpace and YouTube, of the blog sites, to help get out their message and communicate both with the American people -- namely with the American people to help achieve the objective that they have from their mission. So my question to you is, to what extent and to what level were military public affairs brought into this decision-making process, and could they have any concerns about their ability to execute a mission using these sites that they're using right now?

ADM. HIGHT: That's another great question. As a matter of fact, the directive allows for operational commanders to request a waiver to this directive based on their requirements, and that might be a public affairs environment, it might be a recruiting environment, et cetera. And so we have received a number of those waiver requests, and they have been validated, and we will honor those, because those are requests made by people trying to conduct to official DOD business.

MR. BERGLING: Any follow-up, Steve?

Q   Yes. The follow-up I would have to that -- it seems that -- kind of focusing on YouTube for a second, it seems that a lot of the video content, stuff that is helping achieve the public affairs mission isn't directly created necessarily by people in an operational capacity; that is, it's individual soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines creating content and uploading on their own, expressing their own patriotism and pride and service and indeed advancing the public affairs mission just on their own directive. Is there any concern that restricting access to these sites will at the end of the day hinder, you know, the overall effort to communicate with the American people about what it is the military's doing?

ADM. HIGHT: Well, that would be a great public affairs question, and I'm not a public affairs officer. But let me just remind you that these incredible young men and women are not prohibited from accessing these recreational websites, and we applaud what they are trying to do relative to getting their view out and letting people understand what they see and what they are doing.

So again, they're not restricted. They simply can't do it from their desk at work. And so when they go back home or go to an Internet cafe or a commercial firm, then they're free to continue to do that.

MR. BERGLING: Did we have anybody else ring in when the conference call began?

Q   Yeah, me, Noah Shanken (sp).

MR. BERGLING: Hey, Noah. Go ahead and ask your question, sir.

Q Good. A, thanks for doing this, Admiral. Really appreciate it. I've sort of got two questions. The first is I want to kind of follow up on David's question and ask -- and try to -- (off mike) -- down here on exactly how much bandwidth these sites were really taking up, if you could even cite an example from a particular area? But it's very unclear to me how much of a bandwidth either of these sites really were.

ADM. HIGHT: Well, let me, just to explain a little bit about the DOD network architecture to answer that question. We have an unclassified intranet within the Department of Defense that intersects the Internet, the Web, in about -- somewhere between 12 and two dozen places. And so for us to answer the question, what does it look like in this particular geographic part of the world, is a difficult technical question for us to answer, because what we do is we (restrict ?) at that Internet DOD network boundary that flow of information.

And so I don't have a -- I can't tell you at a particular part of the world what does the actual bandwidth look like and the impact, but I can tell you as an average across CONUS and the Pacific, where these policies were not instituted before, we have -- we can see about a 40- megabyte peak going from the DOD networks into the Internet at any one time. So that's an average across all of those couple of dozen access points between the DOD networks and the World Wide Web itself.

Q I'm sorry, but that's to the World Wide Web itself, not necessarily to YouTube or MySpace specifically, is that right?

ADM. HIGHT: That's correct.

Q Okay.

ADM. HIGHT: That's just to and from the Internet access point.

Q Okay. And so what I'm hearing -- correct me if I'm wrong -- is that it -- you know -- is that there's almost an intuitive sense that sites that deliver video are bandwidth hogs, and therefore, they ought to be -- you know, they ought -- access to them ought to be restricted, not that you specifically tracked YouTube or MySpace themselves and their network impact, is that right?

ADM. HIGHT: Actually, what we did was we looked at the highest volume website that we're in fact using a large amount of bandwidth, and we've selected the highest 11 sites, the sites with the highest bandwidth as a proactive measure.

But recall that there's another issue here too, and it's not just bandwidth, but it is ensuring that we protect these DOD networks from a security standpoint. And one of the things we do at that Internet- DOD network boundary is employ very specific security measures.

Q   So that it might not just be the -- it's not the bandwidth necessarily per se, but it's also making sure that there's no exploits or whatever hidden in a MySpace page.

ADM. HIGHT: Or in anything else, you know.

Q   Right.

ADM. HIGHT: Right. So --

Q   And -- sorry, and then just a bit of a follow-up question on that. Has there been any -- I mean, we all know that within the Pentagon there's a tremendous amount of PowerPoint presentations that get ferreted around, and some of those things are absolutely necessary and some of them are less so. Has there been any thought to maybe trying to shrink the usage or the size of these PowerPoint presentations that get e-mailed around so often?

ADM. HIGHT: Yes. As a matter of fact, one of the things we're encouraging everyone to do is follow best practices to make sure that we only use the amount of bandwidth absolutely necessary to consume the -- to provide that information necessary for decision-makers and others.

Q   Okay. And lastly, what -- you know, there was some talk about the operational security aspect of this. There were several comments made that this was not only a bandwidth concern, but also an op sec concern. I was hoping you could address what portion -- you know, how op sec played into this decision.

ADM. HIGHT: Op sec played absolutely no part in the decision by U.S. STRATCOM to limit access to recreational websites. And the reason for that is we are protectors and defenders and operators of the network, and we -- and we do not get into the content of the information flowing over the network.

But Mr. Bettencourt had an idea.

MR. BETTENCOURT: Well, I just wanted to make a point on the previous question that part of what is offered on Army Knowledge Online is a set of collaboration sites, and one of our best practices is that we post some of these big PowerPoint presentations there and then e-mail links to the presentation around the -- around the Defense networks, but rather than forwarding -- as you say, rather than forwarding these large PowerPoint briefings around.

MR. BERGLING: Okay. Thank you, sir.

I wonder if we had anybody else join since the conversation began. We've heard from Mark, Dave, Steve and Noah. Was there anybody else who signed in?

Okay, we'll go back to Mark. Mark, would you --

Q   Yes, a quick follow-up again on the operational security side of things. In addition -- you know, there was some discussion in recent weeks about some of the guidelines that had been put out about, you know, blogging and other online activities, and there was some subsequent clarification about that. Could you talk -- in addition to the guidelines that are in place and to the extent that you can discuss it, is there also active monitoring that goes on, be it on DOD computers or on NWR sites, as to content that might be going out for operational security considerations?

ADM. HIGHT: Well, this directive applies only to the network resources themselves, not to content. And so I would have to defer that question to someone in the OSD-PA to be able to get you an answer because, quite frankly, that's just not a part --

Q   That's not your area. Okay, I understand. Thank you.

MR. BERGLING: Okay, Dave.

Q   Forgive my ignorance on this front, but how are these websites security -- network security issues?

ADM. HIGHT: Well, of course, anything is a network security issue. It's the reason you and I have anti-virus and other capabilities on our home computers. So any particular website could offer some kind of security vulnerability. And we are in a constant effort to make sure that we limit any cyber criminal activity that's targeting DOD users, any malicious software, any identity theft issues, and we work those issues very heavily at this Internet-DOD boundary.

Q   Right. But you said that the decision to limit these 11 websites was in part influenced by network security concerns.

ADM. HIGHT: Well, if I communicated that, I did it poorly. What I'm expressing was those 11 sites were chosen based on volume. But that the decision to limit use of any non-official DOD website -- or sorry -- non-DOD computer resource use was a balance between bandwidth availability and preservation, and network security. And in the world that I work in, quite frankly, you can never separate those two.

Q   Okay. All right, thank you.

MR. BERGLING: Steve, do you have any more questions?

Q   Yes, I sure do. You were talking about how this directive is really focused at recreational sites. I know that right now there has been a move to restrict access to popular blog-hosting platforms like Blogger or WordPress. But would you classify those types of sites as recreational? And if in the future this -- or the Pentagon decided that

they were restraining bandwidth too much, would there be a move to restrict access to those sites as well?

ADM. HIGHT: There may be. This is not a decision made by DISA, it was made by the commander of U.S. Strategic Command, who has operational responsibility for ensuring the forces supporting the United States are offered the highest level of network security and availability. So that's just a clarification.

Q   Okay.

ADM. HIGHT: But I think what's most important about that -- and actually the news media have helped us increase the awareness of our own constituency, our own soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines, on the impact of these very high-volume, high bandwidth uses that technology brings to us. You know, quite frankly, a person who is deployed overseas may have no idea how much a streaming video takes on a -- how much bandwidth a streaming video takes. And so this is a way for us to increase their awareness. It's a way for us to get the word out to the users of those 5 million computers that we have in DOD. And quite frankly, because we offer so many alternatives to using the DOD network resources, we're hoping it just simply becomes a matter of course that folks will not use the DOD resources but go to their own personal or commercial providers.

Q   So in other words, if STRATCOM or another agency that's overseeing this thought that access to blogging platforms was posing a significant enough threat to bandwidth, it would be possible for there to be a move to ban those sites as well.

ADM. HIGHT: That's exactly right.

(Cross talk.)

MR. BERGLING: We're quickly running out of time. So was that Mr. Bettencourt who was trying to get a word in there?

MR. BETTENCOURT: Yes, it was.

MR. BERGLING: Go for it, sir.

MR. BETTENCOURT: I just wanted to talk to blogging as a technology. I mean, that's something that obviously, in my case, our soldiers and also airmen, sailors and Marines -- I mean, that's a technology they come in comfortable with now to the military. And so in our official spaces, like Army Knowledge Online, which is becoming Defense Knowledge Online, we're making provisions for that technology. We have instant messenging; we have chat rooms; we have discussion groups. And we're bringing in within the next month a blogging capability in addition to those. So as a technology, that is something that we're embracing. I think what Admiral Hight is discussing today is the recreational use of that technology.

MR. BERGLING: Okay, ma'am, we're just about out of time. So if you have any closing statement or some closing comments, this would be a great time for that.

ADM. HIGHT: Well, I appreciate that. And again, thank you so much for joining us and giving us a chance to have this dialogue. I think it's so important to realize that we have -- we are not trying to muzzle our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines. In fact this is a great new story, because we're trying to ensure that the DOD networks are there for them to complete their mission, while ensuring that there are alternatives for them to enjoy their recreational hobbies. So I hope that I've been clear on that. And if you have any questions, please send them in to us, and I'll provide a response.

MR. BERGLING: All right, thank you, Admiral Hight. Thank you, Mr. Bettencourt. I want to thank everybody for some great questions and comments. I want to let you guys know that this bloggers roundtable program will be available online, www.defendamerica.mil, with the audio file, print transcripts and biographies of the people attending here. Just look for the bloggers roundtable area. The related story will be written for the American Forces Press Service, posted later today or early tomorrow on the Department of Defense website, defenselink.mil. If you have any questions about this program, please contact the Department of Defense New Media Team at bloggersoutreach@hq.afis.osd.mil, e-mail, I think, you guys are all familiar with. Again, thank you, Rear Admiral Hight, Mr. Bettencourt, and this concludes today's event.

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